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Nathanial Gow, Clarkson, Davie, and Morris, which she arranged for the piano. While her description of this as ‘country dance’ music may strike Scottish readers as somewhat blunt, Clarke presents evidence that Scottish tunes regularly featured in early colonial social dances along with the specialist choreography associated with particular strathspeys and reels.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, fashions had changed. The Scottish and, indeed, English ‘country dance’ had been displaced by the French quadrille, the pan-European (originally Polish) polka, and the Austrian waltz, reflecting what was probably a similar fashion in Britain at the time. Nineteenth-century Australians also enjoyed the “schottische” – a European version of a Scots-snap dance similar to the polka that had little to do with Scottish tradition and more to do with European taste for romantic novels (in translation) by Walter Scott – Scottish identity as seen through a lens of romantic ‘othering’. Exceptionally, a fashion for the marginally more authentic-sounding ‘highland reel’ was sparked by Queen Victoria’s second son, Prince Alfred, during his tour of Australia in 1867, where on one occasion he apparently requested that dance. The prince’s request appears to have been for a particular dance tune rather than a whole repertoire, and its subsequent popularity probably said more about Australia’s affection for the royal family than about its Scottishness.

The other essays in this book, less relevant to Scottish studies, demonstrate how Australian music responded to new waves of music from jazz-age America. Influences from Asia, and indigenous populations, are not explored; the essays focus on a literate tradition of music curation, using western musical scores to reconstitute remembered repertoires. The two chapters dealing with New Zealand do not focus on the experiences of the many Scots who settled there, but rather upon the wider European repertoire featured in emigrant collections more generally. Clare Gleeson’s essay, ‘Those who played and bound: Bound volumes of piano music as an indicator of social change’, discusses how the popularity of the piano grew in New Zealand as in Australia, and includes anecdotes of fathers giving daughters pianos when they married as a mark of aspiring gentility – a theme that will remind some readers of New Zealand filmmaker Jane Campion’s 1993 film *The Piano*, about a fictional emigrant.

Finally, Matthew Stephens’ essay ‘From piano stool to library shelf: reconnecting library and museum owner-bound music collections with audiences’ brings us full circle. As curator of the 2019 exhibition ‘Songs of Home’ at the Museum of Sydney, Stephens collaborated with academics at Glasgow University and Southampton University in an AHRC-funded project that, although principally focused on the musical life of New South Wales in the first seventy years of its existence, highlighted the importance of Scottish music as one strand in the weave of Indigenous and diasporic identities in modern Australia. Here in Scotland, awareness of Australian musical connections has fed into recording projects like Concerto Caledonia’s *Songs of Home and Distant Isles: Music from Scotland in the Early Australian Colonies* (2020), which includes material from Georgiana McCrae’s collection, illustrating the middle-class Lowland Scottish music-making that Georgiana knew from her youth and which she tried to preserve in her new home. Stephens’ insights, like those of the other writers who contributed to this book, help us become aware of how these Scottish emigrants ‘curated’ the sounds of home, and thus allow us to imagine what that home world might have sounded like.

JANE PETTEGREE

***WEBSPINNER: Songs, Stories, and Reflections of Duncan Williamson, Scottish Traveller.* John D. Niles. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022. Pp. 343+ix. Maps; illus. [ISBN \(hardback\) 9781496841575](#).**

The present work adds to a considerable body of published literature, both academic and mainstream, documenting the life and traditions of the Scottish Travellers, and in particular the gifted singer and storyteller Duncan Williamson (1928–2007). But while acknowledging the most important of these earlier works, John D. Niles deliberately avoids duplicating information or materials that they contain, or that are otherwise widely available. As it turns out, the world of Duncan and his fellow Travellers

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offers ample scope for further exploration. Niles has produced a solid and innovative work of ten chapters, eight of which are entirely in Duncan Williamson's own words, as transcribed from recordings made by Niles in a variety of settings.¹⁷

The plan of the book is undeniably ambitious. On the one hand, it offers 'a great deal about Williamson's character and values as a man ... how he thought of his life in the world *through the medium of stories*' (4). At the same time, his accounts of growing up in the Travelling community in the 1930s and 1940s, and of leading a Traveller family in the middle of the last century will appeal to those interested in social history and ethnography. Initially, Niles's research motivations were ethnological: to better understand, from an 'emic' perspective, traditional storytelling among the Travellers in terms of its importance to culture and society, its educational function, its transmission, and its performance dynamics. Eventually, he began to wonder about 'the role of oral art forms in shaping the mental world that human beings inhabit', and how an understanding of master storytellers such as Duncan Williamson might shed light on earlier, even prehistoric, storytelling traditions (5–6). At the center of the approach is Duncan's own firm belief that stories and storytelling, far from abstractions, reflect and document a person's experience of life.

The recordings that form the core of this book were made between 1984 and 1986, primarily in Fife but also in the United States. In a resourceful move in fieldwork practice, Niles recorded Duncan in a variety of settings in order to capture how he adapted his style when performing for different sorts of audiences. While many of the recordings are one-on-one interviews, Niles also recorded Duncan speaking to groups of listeners. Sessions with multiple participants included two research groups from the United States, each comprising six to eight volunteers (1986 and 1988), as well as sessions attended by Travellers and other friends and family members. Black-and-white photographs, including many of Williamson himself, are provided throughout the text.

Following Niles's initial chapter, 'Williamson and the Travellers', the organization of the book is broadly thematic. Following the chronology of his life, Duncan describes his Traveller predecessors and family history, his childhood in Argyll, and how he made a living as a Traveller. His accounts contain valuable ethnographical information about courtship, marriage, and childrearing; foodways and conviviality; and music, storytelling and Traveller society. In a chapter entitled 'Scenes from a Vanished World', he responds to archival photographs of traditional Traveller life held in the Highland Folk Museum, located at the time in Kingussie. These photos – here rendered as sketches made by Niles's mother, Helen Beccard Niles – prompt memories in which Duncan is able to identify specific locations and even individuals. Throughout these eight chapters, Duncan has woven twenty songs and thirty-five distinct narratives, including tales, personal anecdotes and lore. Finally, Niles draws together his own conclusions from the recorded material and from his long and fruitful working relationship with Williamson in a chapter entitled 'Webspinner: The Book, the Poem, and the Man'.

Those who knew Duncan well will have heard some of the accounts in these chapters, but rarely in such detail. For the twenty-first century reader, the pervasive quality of Duncan's narrative account of his life reveals the power of the medium of story. The accounts of his family background and youth provide a good basis for understanding the world into which he was born and his passage through it. Many of the family stories are matter of fact, with relatives fondly remembered, and their various actions and situations described almost laconically. They also reveal the scores of ways in which travellers have made a living: the usual trades of tinsmithing, hawking and farm work, but also forestry and quarry work, and the constant, often friendly relations with the local aristocracy who owned the Argyll estate. And there were the signs even from Duncan's youth that the world was changing. In his Commentary at the end of the book, Niles notes that:

Once, when Duncan was speaking of the woods near Furnace where he had lived as a child [...], he remarked to me that his father had walked off alone into the hills one day

¹⁷ Selections from John D. Niles's field recordings, photographs, and other documentation, including material about Duncan Williamson, can be found on the [Scottish Voices](https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AScottishVoicesColl) website of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center (<https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AScottishVoicesColl>).

and had buried his tinsmithing tools where they would not be found. This was his way of ensuring that no son of his would take up the tinsmith's craft, which had become practically worthless in an era of cheap mass-produced goods. (285)

Duncan was born in a tent beside Loch Fyne, Argyll, delivered by his grandmother. There he was raised within a large family and – as he was often to mention – in constant contact with the natural world around him. From an early age he acquired skills such as guddling trout and snaring rabbits, developing a high sense of self-reliance, not least when it came to gathering food. Relations with the settled villagers nearby were not always cordial, but his treatment by the teachers at the local school (where attendance was mandatory for a certain number of days per year) was surprisingly positive, and encouraged him to read. As he grew, he acquired a wide range of other skills in keeping with his own saying, 'Everything in the world, you must learn everything to be a travellin people! You must have every trade in the world. Even though you're no guid at it, ye can try your best.' (87) Descriptions of various traditional crafts – e.g. gathering willows for making baskets with the accompanying photo – are often detailed and instructive and interspersed with stories. Apprenticed at age fifteen to stonemason Neil McCallum, Duncan not only learned a new trade, but gained access to an Argyll Gaelic storytelling tradition that he came to share widely. Later he became a competent horseman and cattle-dealer, as well as a scrap metal trader. These personal accounts, varying in subject and scene and frequently combined with songs and stories, are invariably engaging and entertaining.

Once he was a teenager old enough to travel on his own, Duncan ranged through Perthshire and northwards to Aberdeen, taking with him 'not one single thing. Just a coat and a pocketknife an some matches. That was all ye needed, nothing else' and enjoying 'a feeling o' freedom' that this life allowed (168). Staying in one camp after another as he worked his way around, he was introduced to the extensive Traveller networks throughout Scotland. Although he does not dramatize these encounters, his introduction to wider Traveller society reads like a singular experience.

It was around this time that he began to make an even greater discovery: the storehouse of traditions, particularly of story and song, of his people. Between 1945 and 1962 he 'travelled round the campfires' (185) listening to and learning as many songs as possible, becoming a field collector in his own right. He developed the ability to recite variants of a single item and recall where, when and from whom he had heard them; and he mentions that he could reproduce storytellers' dialects, whether Border or Highland. Duncan's account also confirms an interesting point regarding tale transmission, noted by other writers, namely, his ability to visualize, as a presence, the reciter from whom he heard the tale. Also worth noting is his remark that, though raised in a Traveller family, he was seventeen or eighteen before he 'knew what ballads were' (200). While he did not regard himself as an exceptional singer, he felt that performing was important as a means of maintaining the songs.

Stories are the other component of Duncan's oral repertoire and form the subject matter of the chapter entitled 'The How and Why of Storytelling'. Duncan is adamant in voicing his conviction that the story is a universal and fundamental part of human experience and a necessary tool for dealing with life's situations: 'a story happens from the minute you wake up in the mornin till you go to bed at night. Everything is a story. It's a story you being *here*' (222).

In his own chapters, Niles demonstrates how evaluating the importance of the material requires a thoughtful, often penetrating evaluation of the storyteller and his tradition. After explaining what motivated him to write this book, Niles assesses Duncan's place among Scottish traditional storytellers, explaining that he possesses a unique combination of gifts: Duncan is an outstanding performer, a charismatic and independent personality, a gifted listener, and the inheritor of an important body of tradition with a clear mission of maintaining and promoting it. With the emergence of the Scottish Folk movement in the 1960s, Duncan's gifts, motivations and circumstances placed him in an ideal position to be an effective mediator between his own people and a wider mainstream culture. He was consummately skilled in reading an audience, whether it was a small conversational group or a public performance. Niles observes, and I think rightly, that Duncan developed an increasingly 'cosmopolitan' perspective, placing him not so much *between* two worlds as *in* the world where we all belong (13).

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In his final chapter, Niles discusses the contemporary relevance of the Traveller ethos and worldview, now accepted by audiences, particularly young people, and those sections of modern society which share concerns regarding environment, social anomie, entrenched individualism and commercialism. Niles dismisses charges of romanticism as inconsistent with the evidence gained from recordings and the Travellers' own direct experience. The chapter ends with a discussion of the storyteller's role as 'Webspinner' (hence the title of the book). Anyone experienced in ethnographic field work knows that close, collaborative friendships between tradition bearers and field workers have existed for generations. Niles's high regard for Duncan Williamson as a tradition bearer, as an individual, and as a friend never interferes with his ability to assess his subject in appropriate and professional terms.

The main text of the book is generously and competently provided with supporting materials useful to readers in Scotland and beyond, and will offer an effective point of departure for further research. A list of songs and stories is included, and the author's chapter-by-chapter Commentary provides background information in a separate section, dispensing with the need for lengthy and cumbersome footnotes. Two appendices providing detailed descriptions of recording and transcription practices are followed by a list of transcriptions; a glossary of Scots and Traveller cant terms; and a selected bibliography.

JOHN SHAW

Scottish Religious Poetry from the Sixth Century to the Present. Selected and introduced by Linden Bicket, Emma Dymock and Alison Jack. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2024. Pp. 326. ISBN 9781800830479.

The first edition of this anthology was published in 2000, and has been out of print for some time. As such, a reprint would have been welcome on its own, but Saint Andrew Press have given us something more: a fully overhauled and expanded new edition. Taking the baton from the first version's editorial crew (Meg Bateman, Robert Crawford and James McGonigal), a trio of Edinburgh-based scholars Linden Bicket, Alison Jack (both of New College) and Emma Dymock (Celtic and Scottish Studies) have produced a worthy spiritual successor to the book's first incarnation.

While the second edition is, in terms of its content, largely *homoousian* with the first, the quarter century between the editions has seen some important changes. Some of these pertain to changes within Scotland itself, for instance the growth of more ethnically diverse communities and faith traditions is represented in the work of Imtiaz Dharker, Bashabi Fraser and Alycia Pirmohamed. Pirmohamed is one of several poets in the volume, among whom also are the Gaelic poet Niall O'Gallagher and Shetlander Roseane Watt, who have emerged in the Scottish poetry scene since the publication of the first edition and who demonstrate that poetic engagement with the questions and challenges of faith continues to grow and develop in new ways. We also see a poem apiece from Bateman, Crawford and McGonigal, who did not include any of their own work (aside from translations) in the first edition.

This is not simply a matter of new wine being poured into an old wineskin, however, as the new edition has retained some of the poets from the first, but with different poems representing them, as with Kathleen Jamie ('Sky-burial' in the first edition; 'The Buddleia' and 'Meadowsweet' in the second), Carol Anne Duffy ('Plainsong' in the first edition; 'Prayer' and 'Pilot's Wife' in the second) and John Burnside (retaining 'Canticle', but swapping out 'The Noli Me Tangere Incident' for 'Nativity'). Others, such as Iain Crichton Smith, Jackie Kay, Liz Lochhead and Tom Leonard, go from one poem apiece in the first edition to two apiece in the second, and Violet Jacob and Marion Angus are also more generously represented now than before.

In general, more recent work in Gaelic has a welcome stronger presence in the new edition, with contributions by Caoimhin MacNèill, Sandaidh NicDhòmhnaill Jones, Aonghas Phàdraig Caimbeul, Marion F. NicIlleMhoire and the aforementioned O' Gallagher. The inclusion of more Gaelic women poets, such as Màiri N NicGhillEathain, means this collection gives more space than the previous edition to allow Gaelic women to speak on their own behalf concerning religion, and not only